

MENEXENUS

Menexenus was also known in antiquity as Funeral Oration; Aristotle cites it once in his Rhetoric under that title. Here Socrates recites to Menexenus an oration for the annual ceremony when Athens praised itself and its citizens fallen in battle for the city. Several such speeches survive, including the celebrated oration of Pericles in Thucydides, Book II. Socrates himself alludes to this famous speech, claiming that its true author was none other than Aspasia, Pericles' intellectually accomplished mistress. He also claims her as his own rhetoric teacher—not that rhetoric ever was her profession!—and in fact as the author of the speech he is about to recite. Knowing that the time was at hand for the selection of this year's speaker, Aspasia, in the usual manner of rhetoric teachers in ancient Greece, had her pupil commit to memory her own composition, as a model of what a funeral orator ought to say. The rest of the dialogue is then occupied with Socrates' recitation.

It is usual in Plato for Socrates to disclaim personal responsibility, as here with Aspasia, for his excursions outside philosophy. One could compare especially Cratylus, where he playfully attributes his brilliant etymologizing to instruction and inspiration from Euthyphro (whose expert knowledge about the gods reported in Euthyphro thus included expert knowledge of the meanings of their names), and Phaedrus, with its appeal to the magical effects of the locale and to Socrates' retentive recall of others' speeches to explain his unaccustomed oratorical prowess. The reader is plainly to understand that this is being represented as Socrates' own speech.

Is Plato the dialogue's author? Aristotle, who cites it twice—not indeed naming Plato as author, but in the same way that he often cites Plato's works, as well known to the reader—gives powerful testimony that he is. Modern scholars' doubts have rested in large part on their inability to conceive what purpose Plato could have had in writing it. One purpose could be satirical, to show by exaggeration how trivial an accomplishment these rhetorical tours-de-force were; better, since Socrates' speech is in fact a highly skilled oration of the genre intended (with all the overblown praise of Athens and the selective attention to history that that entails), is to think it may show (as indeed the Phaedrus claims) how very much better a skilled philosopher is at the composition of speeches than the usual rhetorical 'expert'. Another ground for doubt has been found in the fact that Socrates carries his story of the Athenians' prowess down to the so-called Corinthian war of 395–387, whose dead he is officially memorializing—long after Socrates' death in 399. But that may only remind us that Plato's, and the ancients', literary conventions are not our own.

Menexenus was a prominent member of the Socratic circle: he is reported as present for the conversation on Socrates' last day (Phaedo), and he is one of the two young men Socrates questions about friendship in Lysis.

J.M.C.

SOCRATES: Where is Menexenus coming from? The market place? 234

MENEXENUS: Yes, Socrates—the Council Chamber, to be exact.

SOCRATES: You at the Council Chamber? Why? I know—you fancy that you're finished with your schooling and with philosophy, and intend to turn to higher pursuits. You think you're ready for them now. At your age, my prodigy, you're undertaking to govern us older men, so that your family may carry on with its tradition of providing someone to look after us. b

MENEXENUS: Socrates, with your permission and approval I'll gladly hold public office; otherwise I won't. Today, however, I went to the Chamber because I heard that the Council was going to select someone to speak over our war-dead. They are about to see to the public funeral, you know.

SOCRATES: Certainly I do. Whom did they choose?

MENEXENUS: Nobody. They put it off until tomorrow. But I think Archinus or Dion will be chosen.

SOCRATES: Indeed, dying in war looks like a splendid fate in many ways, Menexenus. Even if he dies a pauper, a man gets a really magnificent funeral, and even if he was of little account, he gets a eulogy too from the lips of experts, who speak not extempore but in speeches worked up long beforehand. They do their praising so splendidly that they cast a spell over our souls, attributing to each individual man, with the most varied and beautiful verbal embellishments, both praise he merits and praise he does not, extolling the city in every way, and praising the war-dead, all our ancestors before us, and us ourselves, the living. The result is, Menexenus, that I am put into an exalted frame of mind when I am praised by them. Each time, as I listen and fall under their spell, I become a different man—I'm convinced that I have become taller and nobler and better looking all of a sudden. It often happens, too, that all of a sudden I inspire greater awe in the friends from other cities who tag along and listen with me every year. For they are affected in their view of me and the rest of the city just as I am: won over by the speaker, they think the city more wonderful than they thought it before. And this high-and-mighty feeling remains with me more than three days. The speaker's words and the sound of his voice sink into my ears with so much resonance that it is only with difficulty that on the third or fourth day I recover myself and realize where I am. Until then I could imagine that I dwell in the Islands of the Blessed. That's how clever our orators are. c

MENEXENUS: You're forever making fun of the orators, Socrates. This time, though, I don't think that the one who's chosen is going to have an easy time of it; the selection is being made at the last minute, so perhaps the speaker will be forced practically to make his speech up as he goes.

- d SOCRATES: Nonsense, my good man. Every one of those fellows has speeches ready-made, and, besides, even making up this kind of speech as you go isn't hard. Now if he were obliged to speak well of the Athenians among the Peloponnesians or the Peloponnesians among the Athenians, only a good orator could be persuasive and do himself credit; but when you're performing before the very people you're praising, being thought to speak well is no great feat.

MENEXENUS: You think not, Socrates?

SOCRATES: No, by Zeus, it isn't.

- e MENEXENUS: Do you think that *you* could deliver the speech, if that were called for, and the Council were to choose you?

SOCRATES: In fact, Menexenus, there would be nothing surprising in my being able to deliver it. I happen to have no mean teacher of oratory. She is the very woman who has produced—along with a multitude of other good ones—the one outstanding orator among the Greeks, Pericles, son of Xanthippus.

MENEXENUS: What woman is that? But obviously you mean Aspasia?

- 236 SOCRATES: Yes, I do—her and Connus, son of Metrobius. These are my two teachers, he of music, she of oratory. Surely it's no surprise if a man with an upbringing like that is skilled in speaking! But even someone less well educated than I—a man who learned music from Lamprus and oratory from Antiphon the Rhamnusian¹—even he, despite these disadvantages, could do himself credit praising Athenians among Athenians.

MENEXENUS: And what would you have to say if the speech were yours to make?

- b SOCRATES: On my own, very likely nothing; but just yesterday in my lesson I heard Aspasia declaim a whole funeral oration on these same dead. For she heard that the Athenians, just as you say, were about to choose someone to speak. Thereupon she went through for me what the speaker ought to say, in part out of her head, in part by pasting together some bits and pieces thought up before, at the time when she was composing the funeral oration which Pericles delivered, as, in my opinion, she did.

MENEXENUS: And can you remember what Aspasia said?

- c SOCRATES: I *think* I can. Certainly I was taught it by the lady herself—and I narrowly escaped a beating every time my memory failed me.

MENEXENUS: So why don't you go ahead and repeat it?

SOCRATES: I'm afraid my teacher will be angry with me if I divulge her speech.

1. Lamprus was a respected musician, and Thucydides called Antiphon the foremost orator in Athens. Socrates' broad ironical point is that no one could have more accomplished teachers than these two.

MENEXENUS: Have no fear, Socrates. Speak. I shall be very grateful, whether you're pleased to recite Aspasia's speech or whosever it is. Only speak.

SOCRATES: But perhaps you will laugh at me if I seem to you, old as I am, to go on playing like a child.

MENEXENUS: Not at all, Socrates. In any case, just speak the speech.

SOCRATES: Well, certainly you're a man I'm so bound to gratify that I would even be inclined to do so if you asked me to take off my clothes and dance—especially since we are alone. All right, listen. To begin with she spoke, I think, on the dead themselves—as follows:

"As for deeds, these men have just received at our hands what they deserve,² and with it they are making the inevitable journey, escorted at the outset communally by the city and privately by their families. Now we must render them in words the remaining recognition that the law appoints for them and duty demands. For when deeds have been bravely done, it is through an eloquent speech that remembrance and honor accrue to their doers from the hearers. Clearly, what is required is a speech that will praise the dead as they deserve but also gently admonish the living, urging their sons and brothers to imitate the valor of these men, and consoling their fathers, their mothers and any of their grandparents who may remain alive.

"Well then, what speech on our part would display that effect? Where would it be right for us to begin our praise of brave men, who in their lives gladdened their families and friends through their valor and by their death purchased safety for their survivors? I think it appropriate to present their praises in an order the same as that in which they became brave—the order of nature: they became brave by being sons of brave fathers. Let us, therefore, extoll first their noble birth, second their rearing and education. After that, let us put on view the deeds they performed, showing that they were noble and worthy of their birth and upbringing.

"The nobility of these men's origin is rooted in that of their ancestors. The latter were not immigrants and did not, by arriving from elsewhere, make these descendants of theirs live as aliens in the land, but made them children of the soil, really dwelling and having their being in their ancestral home, nourished not, as other peoples are, by a stepmother, but by a mother, the land in which they lived. Now they lie in death among the familiar places of her who gave them birth, suckled them, and received them as her own. Surely it is most just to celebrate the mother herself first; in this way the noble birth of these men is celebrated at the same time.

"Our land is indeed worthy of being praised not merely by us but by all of humanity. There are many reasons for that, but the first and greatest is that she has the good fortune to be dear to the gods. The quarrel of the

2. The remains of the dead have been exposed to view, mourned, and carried in procession to the tomb, where the speech is being delivered.

d gods who disputed over her and the verdict that settled it bear witness to what we say.³ How could it not be just for all humankind to praise a land praised by the gods? The second commendation that is due her is that in the age when the whole earth was causing creatures of all kinds—wild animals and domestic livestock—to spring up and thrive, our land showed herself to be barren of savage beasts and pure. Out of all the animals she selected and brought forth the human, the one creature that towers over the others in understanding and alone acknowledges justice and the gods.

e “The fact that everything that gives birth is supplied with the food its offspring needs is weighty testimony for this assertion that the earth hereabouts gave birth to these men’s ancestors and ours. For by this sign it can be seen clearly whether or not a woman has really given birth: she is foisting off an infant not her own, if she does not have within her the wellsprings of its nourishment. The earth here, our mother, offers precisely this as sufficient testimony that she has brought forth humans. She first
238 and she alone in that olden time bore food fit for humans, wheat and barley, which are the finest and best nourishment for the human race, because she really was the mother of this creature. And such testimonies are to be taken more seriously on earth’s behalf than a woman’s, inasmuch as earth does not mimic woman in conceiving and generating, but woman earth.

“She was not miserly with this grain; she dispensed it to others too. Later she brought olive oil to birth for her children, succor against toil. And when she had nourished them and brought them to their youthful
b prime, she introduced the gods to rule and teach them. They (it is fitting to omit their names on an occasion like this: we know them) equipped us for living, by instructing us, earlier than other peoples, in arts for meeting our daily needs, and by teaching us how to obtain and use arms for the defense of the land.

“With the birth and education I have described, the ancestors of these men lived under a polity that they had made for themselves, of which it
c is right to make brief mention. For a polity molds its people; a goodly one molds good men, the opposite bad. Therefore I must show that our ancestors were molded in a goodly polity, thanks to which both they and the present generation—among them these men who have died—are good men. For the polity was the same then and now, an aristocracy; we are now governed by the best men and, in the main, always have been since that remote age. One man calls our polity democracy, another some other
d name that pleases him; in reality, it is government by the best men along with popular consent. We have always had kings; at one time they were

3. In myth Athena and Posidon vied for sovereignty of Athens. On the grounds that Athena’s gift of the olive tree was more valuable than the salt-water spring Posidon had made gush forth on the Acropolis, the twelve gods appointed by Zeus to arbitrate the dispute awarded the sovereignty to her.

hereditary, later elected.⁴ Yet in most respects the people have sovereign power in the city; they grant public offices and power to those who are thought best by them at a given time, and no one is excluded because of weakness or poverty or obscurity of birth, nor is anyone granted honors because of the corresponding advantages, as happens in other cities. There is, rather, one standard: he who is thought wise or good exercises power and holds office.

"The reason we have this polity is our equality in birth. The other cities have been put together from people of diverse origin and unequal condition, so that their polities also are unequal—tyrannies and oligarchies. Some of their inhabitants look on the others as slaves, while the latter look on the former as masters. We and our fellows—citizens, all brothers sprung from one mother, do not think it right to be each other's slaves or masters. Equality of birth in the natural order makes us seek equality of rights in the legal and defer to each other only in the name of reputation for goodness and wisdom.

"Because of this splendid polity of ours, the fathers of these men—our fathers—and the men themselves, brought up in complete freedom and well-born as they were, were able to display before all humanity, in both the private and the public spheres, many splendid deeds. They thought that they were obliged to fight on the side of freedom both for Greeks against Greeks and against barbarians for Greece as a whole. My time is too brief to narrate as the matter deserves how they defended their country against Eumolpus and the Amazons and even earlier invaders, or how they defended the Argives against the Cadmeans and the sons of Heracles against the Argives.⁵ Besides, poets have already hymned the valorous exploits of the ancients in splendid song and made them known to all; so if we should try to elaborate the same subjects in prose, we would perhaps finish a clear second.

"I think it best to pass those deeds by for that reason as well as because they already have a reward worthy of them. But in regard to deeds for which no poet has yet received glory worthy of worthy themes, and which remain in virgin state⁶—those I think I ought to mention with praise and

4. After the monarchy was abolished at Athens, one of the nine principal administrative officials, called archons, was the "king archon." He was concerned for the most part with religious functions.

5. Eumolpus was defeated at Eleusis by the legendary Athenian king Erechtheus. According to legend, the Amazons, when they invaded Athens, were defeated by Theseus, who also led the Athenians in forcing Thebes, founded by Cadmus, to return the Argive dead after the war of the Seven Against Thebes. The Sons of Heracles were supposed to have been pursued by their father's enemy Eurystheus, who ruled cities in the part of the Peloponnese that is often referred to, somewhat loosely, as Argos. When they took refuge in Athens, he marched against them and was defeated and killed by the Athenians.

6. Reading *en mnēsteia(i)* in c4.

woo out of seclusion for others to put into choral odes and poems of other kinds in a manner that befits the men who performed them.

d Here are the first among the deeds I mean. When the Persians held
 d dominion over Asia and were trying to enslave Europe, the sons of this
 land checked them—our fathers, whose valor it is both right and necessary
 to mention first in praise. Clearly one who is to praise it well must contem-
 plate it after he has, in thought, been transported into that time when the
 whole of Asia was already subject to a third Persian king. Cyrus, the first of
 e them, when by his keen spirit he liberated his fellow citizens, the Persians,
 enslaved the Medes, their masters, at the same time and became lord over
 the rest of Asia as far as Egypt; his son over as much of Egypt and Libya
 as it was possible to penetrate. Darius, third of the line, with his land
 forces set the bounds of his sway as far as Scythia, and with his ships
 240 gained so much control over the sea and its islands that no one presumed
 to oppose him. The minds of all humankind were in bondage: so many,
 such great and warlike, peoples had the realm of Persia enslaved.

“Now Darius denounced us and the Eretrians. On the pretext that we
 had plotted against Sardis he dispatched five hundred thousand men in
 transport and combat ships, with three hundred ships of war, and ordered
 Datis, their commander, to come back with the Athenians and Eretrians
 in tow if he wanted to keep his head on his shoulders.

b “Datis sailed to Eretria, against men who were the most highly esteemed
 in warfare of the Greeks of that time and were quite numerous besides.
 He overpowered them in three days. He also scoured their whole country
 to keep anyone from escaping. This he accomplished in the following
 way: his soldiers proceeded to the border of Eretria’s territory and posted
 themselves at intervals from sea to sea; they then joined hands and passed
 c through the entire country, so that they would be able to tell the king that
 no one had escaped them.

“Datis and his force left Eretria and came ashore at Marathon with the
 same intention, confident that it would be easy for them to force the
 Athenians under the same yoke as they had the Eretrians and lead them
 captive too. Even though the first of these operations had been accom-
 plished and the second was underway, none of the Greeks came to aid
 either the Eretrians or the Athenians except the Lacedaemonians—and
 d they arrived on the day after the battle. All the others were panic-stricken
 and lay low, cherishing their momentary safety.

“By being transported into that situation, I say, one might realize just
 how great the valor really was of those men who withstood the might of
 the barbarians⁷ at Marathon, chastened the arrogance of all Asia, and were
 first to erect a trophy⁸ over the barbarians. They showed the way and

7. I.e., as usual in classical Greek, the Persians. Similarly, “king” below refers to the king of Persia.

8. I.e., win a battle; trophies, usually consisting of a suit of enemy armor on a stake, were erected at battle sites by the army still in possession of the field after the action.

taught the rest that Persian power is not invincible and that there is no multitude of men and mass of money that does not give way to valor. I declare that those men were fathers not only of our bodies but of our freedom, ours and that of everyone on this continent. For it was with eyes on that deed that the Greeks dared to risk the battles for their deliverance that followed—pupils of the men who fought at Marathon.

“So the highest rank in honor must be assigned to them by my speech, but the second to the men who fought and won at sea off Salamis and at Artemisium.⁹ For one could give a lengthy account of those men, too—the kind of assaults they withstood on land and sea, and how they fought them off. But I shall mention what I think is their finest achievement: they accomplished the successor to the task accomplished at Marathon. The men there showed the Greeks only that a few of them could fight off many barbarians by land; by sea there was still doubt, and the Persians had a reputation for invincibility because of their numbers, wealth, skill, and strength. This in particular is what merits praise in the men who fought the sea battles of those times: they freed the Greeks from this second terror and made them stop fearing preponderance in ships and men. So it turns out that the other Greeks were educated by both—by those who fought at Marathon and those who took part in the naval battle at Salamis: as pupils of the former by land and the latter by sea, they lost their habit of fearing the barbarians.

“And of the exploits for the deliverance of Greece that at Plataea was, I maintain, the third, both in number and in valor—at last an effort shared by both the Lacedaemonians and the Athenians.

“So all the men in those battles fought off a very great and formidable danger. They are being eulogized for their valor now by us, and will be eulogized in the future by posterity. Afterwards, though, many Greek cities were still subject to the barbarian, and it was reported that the king himself had a new attempt on the Greeks in mind. Therefore, it is right for us to mention those, too, who, by cleansing the sea and driving from it the entire barbarian force, brought to completion what their predecessors had done for our deliverance. These were the men who fought in the naval battle at Eurymedon, those who made the expedition to Cyprus, and those who sailed to Egypt and many other places. They must be mentioned with gratitude, because they instilled fear in the king and forced him to ponder his own safety rather than plot the destruction of the Greeks.

“Well, this war against the barbarians was endured to the end by the whole city in defense of ourselves and our fellow speakers of Greek. But when peace prevailed and the city was held in honor, there came upon her what people generally inflict on the successful: jealousy and—through jealousy—ill-will. And that involved her, reluctantly, in fighting against Greeks. When war had broken out, the Athenians did battle with the

9. During the second Persian invasion of the Greek mainland, by Darius' son Xerxes in 480–479.

- b Lacedaemonians at Tanagra for the freedom of the Boeotians, and although the issue of the battle was unclear, the action that followed was decisive. For the Lacedaemonians withdrew and abandoned those whom they had come to aid, but our men were victorious at Oenophyta two days later and justly restored those who were unjustly in exile. They were the first after the Persian War to fight for the freedom of Greeks in the new way—
- c against Greeks; and since they proved to be brave men and liberated those to whose aid they came, they were the first to be buried in this tomb with civic honors.

- “Later, when a great war¹⁰ had broken out, and all the Greeks attacked our city, ravaged her land, and made sorry recompense for the services she had done them, our countrymen, who had been victorious over them at sea and had captured their Lacedaemonian leaders on Sphacteria, spared
- d the latter, sent them home, and made peace, even though they could have killed them. They thought that against men of their own race it is right to make war as far as victory rather than bring the common interests of Greece to ruin through resentment against one city, but against the barbarians it is right to make total war. The men who fought in that war and now lie here deserve praise, because they showed that if anyone maintained that in the former war, the one against the barbarians, any other people were braver than the Athenians, that was not true. By prevailing when Greece
- e was in discord, by getting the better of the foremost among the other Greeks, they showed on this occasion that they could conquer by themselves those with whom they had once conquered the barbarians in a common effort.

- “After this peace a third war¹¹ broke out—a war that defied all expectations and was terrible. Many brave men who died in it lie here. Many fell
- 243 on Sicilian shores after they had set up a great many trophies in battles for the freedom of the people of Leontini. Bound by oaths, they had sailed to those parts to defend them, but when their city found herself thwarted on account of the length of the voyage and could not reinforce them, they gave out and came to grief. Their enemies, even though they fought on the other side, have more praise for their self-control and valor than have the friends of other men. Many fell, too, in naval battles on the Hellespont,
- b after capturing all the enemy ships in one engagement,¹² and coming off victorious in many others.

“As for my saying that the war was terrible and defied all expectations, what I mean is that the other Greeks arrived at such a pitch of jealous rivalry against our city that they brought themselves to send an embassy

10. The reference is to the first part (432–421) of the Peloponnesian War, called the Archidamian War after a Spartan, i.e., Lacedaemonian, king.

11. This “third war” (counting the Persian War as the first) is the second and final part of the Peloponnesian War, which broke out when the Athenians sent an expedition to Sicily in 415 and which lasted until 404.

12. The battle of Cyzicus, in 410.

to their worst enemy, the king, whom they had as our allies expelled in a common effort, to bring him back on their own, a barbarian against Greeks, and to muster everyone, Greeks and barbarians, against our city.

"And at just that point her strength and valor shone bright. For when her enemies supposed that she was already beaten, and when her ships were blockaded at Mytilene, the citizens themselves embarked and went to the rescue with sixty ships. After they had, as everyone agrees, behaved most heroically in overcoming their enemies and rescuing their friends, they met with undeserved calamity: their dead were not picked up from the sea and do not lie here.¹³ We ought to remember and praise those men forever, because by their valor we won not only that naval engagement, but also the rest of the war. For it was through them that the opinion gained currency that our city could never be defeated in war, not even by all mankind. And that belief was true. We were overcome by our own quarrels, not by other men; by them we remain undefeated to this day, but we conquered ourselves and suffered defeat at our own hands.

"Afterwards, when tranquillity reigned and we were at peace with our neighbors, there was civil war¹⁴ among us, fought in such a way that, if people *had* to engage in internal strife, no one would pray for his city to be stricken in any other. So readily and naturally—so much contrary to the expectations of the other Greeks—did the citizens from the Piraeus and those from the city deal with each other! So moderately did they bring the war against the men at Eleusis to a conclusion!

"And the sole cause for all that was their genuine kinship, which provided them, not in word but in fact, with a firm friendship based on ties of blood. We must also remember those who died at each other's hands in that war and try to reconcile them in ceremonies such as today's by what means we have—prayers and sacrifices—praying to the gods below who have power over them, since we ourselves are reconciled as well. For they did not lay hands on each other through wickedness or enmity, but through misfortune. And we, the living, are witnesses of this ourselves, since we, who are of the same stock, have forgiven each other for what we did and for what we suffered.

"After that we got general peace, and the city enjoyed tranquillity. She forgave the barbarians; she had done them harm, and they gave as good as they got. But the Greeks aroused her indignation, because she recalled the thanks they had returned for the good she had done them—by making common cause with the barbarians, stripping her of the ships that had once been their salvation, and dismantling walls once sacrificed by us to

13. Failure to pick up the dead and rescue the wounded from the sea after the battle of Arginusae, in 406, caused widespread resentment against the generals in charge.

14. This "civil war" was fought in 403 to restore the Athenian democracy by ousting the oligarchy of the "Thirty Tyrants," who had seized power with Spartan help at the end of the Peloponnesian War. The conclusion of the civil war, referred to just below, came about through the defeat of the Thirty at Eleusis, where they had retreated.

keep theirs from falling.¹⁵ The city formed a policy of no longer protecting Greeks from being enslaved, either by each other or by barbarians, and conducted herself accordingly. So, since this was our policy, the Lacedaemonians, thinking that we, the champions of freedom, had fallen and all they had to do now was enslave the other Greeks, set about that very task.

"And why should I prolong the tale? From here on I wouldn't be speaking of things that happened in the past to former generations. We ourselves know how the foremost among the Greeks—the Argives and the Boeotians and Corinthians—came, in a state of panic, to feel a need for our city, and—wonder of wonders!—even the king reached such a point of perplexity that his deliverance came full circle to arising from nowhere other than this city, which he had kept zealously trying to destroy.

"In fact, if one should wish to lay a just charge against our city, one would rightly blame her only by saying that she is always too compassionate and solicitous of the underdog. And during this time in particular, she was not able to persevere and stick to the policy she had decided on—namely, to aid against enslavement none of the cities that had treated her people unfairly. On the contrary, she relented, came to the rescue, and released the Greeks from slavery by coming to their aid herself, with the result that they remained free until they once more enslaved themselves. On the other hand—out of respect for the trophies at Marathon and Salamis and Plataea—she could not stomach aiding the king in person; but merely by allowing exiles and mercenaries to assist him, she was, by common consent, his salvation. And after she had rebuilt her walls and fleet, she took the war upon herself, when she was forced to do so, and fought with the Lacedaemonians in the Parians' behalf.

"The king came to fear our city, when he saw that the Lacedaemonians were giving up the war at sea. Out of a wish to disengage himself, he demanded, as his price for continuing to fight on our side and that of the other allies, the Greeks on the Asian mainland whom the Lacedaemonians had previously made over to him.¹⁶ He did so because he believed that we would refuse and give him an excuse for disengaging. He was mistaken about the other allies; the Corinthians, the Argives, the Boeotians, and the rest were willing to hand them over to him and made a sworn treaty on terms that if he would give them money, they would hand over the Greeks on the mainland. We alone could not bring ourselves to betray them or swear the oath. That is how firm and sound the high-mindedness and liberality of our city are, how much we are naturally inclined to hate the barbarians, through being purely Greek with no barbarian taint. For people

15. In response to Xerxes' invasion, the Athenians abandoned their city walls to destruction and took to the "wooden walls" of their ships, which were instrumental in defeating the Persians at Salamis. Now Sparta had exacted the destruction of both walls and ships in the peace terms that ended the Peloponnesian War.

16. This probably refers to the terms under which the Spartans brought Persia into the Peloponnesian War against Athens in 412.

who are barbarians by birth but Greeks by law—offspring of Pelops, Cadmus, Aegyptus, Danaus and many others—do not dwell among us.¹⁷ We dwell apart—Greeks, not semibarbarians. Consequently, our city is imbued with undiluted hatred of foreignness.

“For all that, we found ourselves once again isolated, because we refused to commit a shameful and sacrilegious deed by betraying Greeks to barbarians. So we arrived in the same circumstances that had led to our defeat before, but this time, with divine help, we managed the war better: we disengaged ourselves while still in possession of our ships, walls, and colonies. That is how glad the enemy, too, were to make peace! But we lost brave men in this war also, victims of rough terrain at Corinth and treason at Lechaëum. Brave, too, were those who extricated the king from his difficulties and banished the Lacedaemonians from the sea. I remind you of those men, and it is fitting for you to praise them with me and do them honor. e

“And these, in truth, were the deeds of the men who lie here and of others who have died for Athens. Many fine words have been spoken about them, but those that remain unsaid are a great deal more numerous and finer still; many days and nights would not suffice for one who sets out to complete the enumeration. Therefore we must remember the fallen, and every man, just as in war, must encourage their descendants not to desert the ranks of their ancestors and not to yield to cowardice and fall back. So then, I myself both so encourage you today, sons of brave men, and in the future, whenever I meet any of you, I will remind you and exhort you to do your utmost to be as brave as can be. b

“On this occasion, though, it is my duty to repeat the words that our fathers commanded us to report to those left at home every time they were about to put their lives at risk, in case they lost them. I will tell you what I heard from them and what—judging by what they said then—they would gladly say to you now, if only they could. Whatever I report you must imagine you are hearing from them in person. And this is what they said: c

“Sons, the present circumstance itself reveals that you are sprung from brave fathers. Free to live on ignobly, we prefer to die nobly rather than subject you and your descendants to reproach and bring disgrace on our fathers and all our ancestors. We consider the life of one who has brought disgrace on his own family no life, and we think that no one, human being or god, is his friend, either on the earth or beneath it after his death. d

“Therefore, you must remember what we say and do whatever you do to the accompaniment of valor, knowing that without it all possessions and all ways of life are shameful and base. For neither does wealth confer c

17. Many Greek cities had adventurers from abroad mixed up in their foundation legends, such as Pelops from Asia Minor at Mycenae, Cadmus from Phoenicia at Thebes, and Aegyptus and Danaus from Egypt and Libya at Argos.

distinction on one who possesses it with cowardice (the riches of a man like that belong to another, not himself) nor do bodily beauty and strength, when they reside in a worthless and cowardly man, seem to suit him. On the contrary, they seem out of character; they show up the one who has them for what he is and reveal his cowardice. Moreover, all knowledge
 247 cut off from rectitude and the rest of virtue has the look of low cunning, not wisdom.

“For these reasons, make it your business from beginning to end to do your absolute utmost always in every way to surpass us and our ancestors in glory. If you do not, be sure that if we excel you in valor, our victory, as we see it, brings us shame, but if we are excelled by you, our defeat brings happiness. And the surest way to bring about our defeat and your
 b victory would be if you would prepare yourselves not to abuse and waste the good repute of your ancestors, because you are aware that for a man with self-respect nothing is more disgraceful than to make himself honored not through himself, but through his ancestors’ glory. Honors that come from ancestors are a noble and magnificent treasure for their descendants, but it is shameful and unmanly to enjoy the use of a treasure of wealth and honors and fail to hand it on to the following generation because of a lack of acquisitions and public recognition on one’s own part. And if
 c you will live as we advise you to live, you will come to us as friends to friends, when your destiny conveys you here; but if you have neglected our advice and behaved as cowards, no one will welcome you. So ends what is to be reported to our sons.

“And as for those of our fathers and mothers who still live, one ought ceaselessly to encourage them to bear the sorrow, should it fall to their lot, as easily as they can, instead of joining them in lamentations. For they
 d will stand in no need of a stimulus for grief; the misfortune that has befallen them will be enough to provide that. A better course is to try to heal and soothe them, by reminding them that the gods have answered their most earnest prayers. For they prayed for their sons to live not forever, but bravely and gloriously. And that—the greatest of boons—is what they received. It is not easy for a mortal to have *everything* in his life turn out as he would have it.

“If they bear their sorrows courageously, they will seem to be really fathers of courageous sons—and just as courageous themselves; but if they
 e succumb to grief, they will provide grounds for suspicion that either they are not our fathers or the people who praise us are mistaken. Neither of these must happen. On the contrary, they above all must be our encomiasts in action, by showing themselves to be true men, with the look of truly being the fathers of true men. *Nothing too much* has long been thought an excellent adage—because it is, in truth, excellent. For that man’s life is best arranged for whom all, or nearly all, the things that promote happiness
 248 depend on himself. Such a man does not hang from other men and necessarily rise or fall in fortune as they fare well or badly; he is the temperate, he is the brave and wise man. He above all, when wealth and children

come and when they go, will pay heed to the adage: because he relies on himself, he will be seen neither to rejoice nor to grieve *too much*.

“That is the sort of men we expect our fathers to be, the sort we wish them to be, and the sort we say they are. It is, moreover, how we now comport ourselves—neither too much vexed nor too fearful if the time of our death is upon us. And we beg our fathers and mothers to pass the rest of their lives with these same sentiments. We want them to know that they will give us no special pleasure by singing dirges and wailing over us. On the contrary, if there is among the dead any perception of the living, that is how they would most displease us—by doing themselves injuries and bearing their sorrows heavily. They would please us most by bearing them lightly and with moderation. By that time our lives will have come to the conclusion that is noblest for human beings, so that it is more fitting to celebrate them than to lament them. But by caring for our wives and children and nourishing them, and by turning their minds to the concerns of the living, they would most readily forget their troubles and live more nobly, more uprightly, and more in harmony with our wishes.

“That is enough to report from us to our parents. As for the city—we would exhort her to care for our parents and children, educating the latter decently and cherishing the former in their old age as they deserve, if we did not, in fact, know that she will care for them well enough with no exhortation from us.’

“Children and parents, the dead commanded me to report those words, and I report them with all my heart. And on my own part, in these men’s name I beg their sons to imitate them, and I beg their fathers to be confident about themselves, knowing that we will, as individuals and as a community, cherish you in your old age and care for you, anywhere any one of us comes upon any one of you. No doubt you yourselves are aware of the concern shown by the city: she has made laws relating to the families of men who have died in war, and she takes care of their children and parents. More than in the case of other citizens, it is the official duty of the highest magistracy to see to it that their fathers and mothers are protected from injustice. The city herself assists in bringing up their children, eager to keep their orphaned condition as hidden from them as it can be. She assumes the role of father to them while they are still children. When they attain manhood, she decks each of them out in hoplite’s armor and sends him out on his life’s business, showing him and reminding him of his father’s pursuits, by giving him the tools of his father’s valor and, at the same time, allowing him, for the sake of the omen, to go for the first time to his ancestral hearth, there to rule in might, arrayed in arms.¹⁸

18. During the festival called the Great Dionysia, before the competition in tragedy which formed part of it, grown sons of men who had been killed in war were presented to the people in the theater, dressed in hoplite armor, and put in charge of their household and property.

249c “The dead themselves she never fails to honor: every year she herself celebrates for all publicly the rites that are celebrated for each in private, and in addition she holds contests in athletic prowess and horsemanship and in music and poetry of every kind. Quite simply, for the dead she stands as son and heir, for their sons as a father, for their parents as a guardian; she takes complete and perpetual responsibility for all of them.

“With this in mind, you ought to bear your sorrow more patiently; in that way you would best please both the dead and the living and would most easily heal and be healed. And now that you and all the others have, according to the custom, publicly lamented the dead, take your departure.”

d There you have it, Menexenus—the speech of Aspasia of Miletus.

MENEXENUS: By Zeus, Socrates, your Aspasia is indeed lucky if, woman though she be, she can compose speeches like that one.

SOCRATES: If you doubt it, come to class with me and hear her speak.

MENEXENUS: I have often talked with Aspasia, and I know what she is like, Socrates.

SOCRATES: Well then, don’t you admire her and aren’t you grateful to her for her speech now?

e MENEXENUS: Yes, Socrates, I’m very grateful for that speech—to her or whoever it was who recited it to you. Furthermore, I’m grateful to him who recited it to me, for that and many other favors besides.

SOCRATES: Very well, but make sure you don’t give me away, so that I may report to you many fine, statesmanlike speeches from her in the future.

MENEXENUS: Don’t worry. I won’t. Just be sure to report them.

SOCRATES: Yes, I’ll be sure to.